

Késsinnimek - Roots - Racines

Joseph Payant dit Saintonge and the Montcalm Family II

by Fr. Owen Taggart

Version française

Translated and adapted from the original by Jacques Saintonge (with permission)

PART II: THE ADMIRAL OF LAKE CHAMPLAIN

It was not long before Joseph Payant set sail on the Richelieu River, shuttling between the forts on Lake Champlain. According to Philippe Demers' monograph "L'Amiral du Lac Champlain", Fort Saint Frederic was supplied by boats from Sainte Therese and Bleury between the years 1731 and 1742, Payant joining the fleet in the latter year. In 1749, he had the honor of having among his passengers the renowned Swedish naturalist Pehr Kalm, and in 1753, the military engineer Louis Franquet, who had come to inspect the fortifications in the Quebec, Trois Rivieres and Montreal regions.

Kalm writes:

The yacht that brought us to Saint Jean is the first built here, and the first to navigate on Lake Champlain; up until now, only boats were used to transport provisions. The captain is of French ancestry, but born in this country. It was he who built the vessel, and he who did the soundings to discover a navigable route between Fort Saint Jean and Fort Saint Frederic.

Demers continues:

It was, then, in 1742 that shipping began in earnest on Lake Champlain. Ships of every class plied the peaceful waters of the lake during all our wars. The title of Admiral given the master boatman might surprise us, especially since it was granted by a decree countersigned by several military officers. At this time in history, the rank was granted to the commander of a fleet of vessels. In 1758,

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operations on the lake required the commissioning of several ships, and no doubt the title of Admiral was granted to Saint Onge, who was master of the flagship. Between 1759 and 1760, the fleet included three xebecs, a great tartan, and officers of the Royal Navy, whereupon St Onge became once again the captain of only one vessel, the schooner St Onge.

But, we must not rush through the events of the times.

The Promised Land

Ten years earlier, the family of Joseph Payant had begun its exodus toward the promised land, the valley of the Richelieu. First to settle there was the seaman Dominique. On 21 February 1745, the young man of 20 was summoned to the home of Jean-Baptiste Besset, at Chambly, where Notary Gervais Hodiesne proceeded to read the marriage convention between him and Marie-Louise Laporte, daughter of François and of Marie-Louise Chedevergne, domiciled in the Seignory of Saint Denis, on Lake Champlain. Louis-Joseph, elder brother of Dominique, was present. The future spouses would hold in common their real and personal properties, according to the custom of Paris. Dominique attested that he owned a woodland lot of three arpents in frontage on Lake Champlain, in the Seignory of M. Foucault. This property was located facing the Isle aux Noix. The marriage took place on the following day, 22 February, in the church of Saint Joseph of Chambly, in the presence of Joseph Payant, the father, Charles Lebeau, Louis Bourbeau, Baptiste and Charlotte Bessette, and Baptiste Laporte. The officiant was Recollet Father Michel Levasseur.

The following year, it was the elder brother, Louis Joseph, who took a wife. He signed his marriage contract on 8 May 1746 before Notary Gilbert Boucault de Godefus, at the home of his father, Joseph Payant, Rue Saint Flavien in Quebec City. The young man, who practiced the armorer's craft, was 23 years of age. In the absence of Joseph Payant, "navigator presently at Pointe à la Chevelure" it was his mother Marie Legris, who stipulated on his behalf, and declared consent in the name of her husband. The future spouse was Genevieve Dalleret, an adult woman, 25 years of age, who resided with Sieur Louis Duniere, tradesman. The future groom was accompanied by his brother Jean-Baptiste, and his uncles Pierre Payant and Jacques Pampalon. The spouses would hold property in common. Louis Joseph brought a dower of 100 livres. Two days later, on 10 May, in the parish church of Quebec the pastor, Joseph André Mathurin Jacrau celebrated the marriage of Louis Joseph Payant, blacksmith, son of Joseph, a ship captain domiciled in the city, and of Marie Legris, to Genevieve, domiciled at the home of Luis Duniere, tradesman, in the presence of several witnesses, including Jean-Baptiste Payant, brother of the groom, who signed, curiously, "Jan Batite paians Saintonge".

At this time, during the winter season, Joseph Payant rarely left his native city. But on 24 January 1750, during the forenoon, he paid a visit to the offices of Notary Hilarion Dulaurent, to negotiate the sale to Louis Lebel dit Beaulieu of a plot of land included in the legacy of Louise Morin, his late mother. The property was eight perches in frontage, more or less, by 25 arpents in depth, located on the Saint Charles River. The property transfer was

effected for the sum of 275 livres, which the purchaser paid in cash.

Three years later, it was also during the winter that Marie-Jeanne Legris bade a final farewell to her loved ones. On 2 March 1753, her family was gathered as she breathed her last. She was buried the following day after obsequies performed by the pastor Jean-Felix Richer, who noted that she was about 45 years of age. In fact, only a few days later she would have celebrated her 54th birthday.

On 15 March, Joseph Payant dit Saint Onge,

commander of the royal bark on Lake Champlain, about to leave and to take command of the said bark, appointed his brother Pierre as his general and special proxy, giving him the authority to receive from the Treasurer General of the colony

all of the monies that might be granted by His Majesty, for wages, for emoluments that might be due, to render payment for all debts and obligations made during his absence, to oversee and administer all of his goods and affairs, present and future, including rentals due to him, and to receive the reimbursement offered in payment of debtors, farmers, and others who have obligations to the said gentleman ...establishing, as well, the authority to confirm and to renew all rental of his goods, to receive any legacy that might be granted to him, all gifts " etc. (C. Paul-Antoine-François Lanouillier Des Granges).

In brief, since he expected to be away for as long as the waterways remained navigable, and no longer able to rely on the support of his spouse, Joseph had chosen the most likely of his brothers to administer his affairs during his absence.

The following spring, on 14 June, Antoine Foucher, Notary practicing at Fort Saint Frederic, records that Joseph Payant,

captain commanding the schooner named Le Saint Frederic, presently docked at the said fort, consents to lend to Jean Rousseau dit Ladouceur, domiciled at Cote Saint François, the sum of 76 livres which the latter promises to reimburse to the commandant of the post during the following month of July.

In 1755, it is Jean-Baptiste, 29 years of age, third son of Joseph, who established permanent residence in the Richelieu valley. On 4 April, before Notary Joseph Lalanne, he pledges to marry Catherine Lerige, daughter of the late Pierre, esquire, Sieur de Laplante, and of Marie-Louise Hebert dit Lacroix, domiciled at Laprairie. This marriage contract specifies that Joseph Payant, "captain employed in the service of the King" still resides in Quebec City. Also present are Nicolas Payant, brother of Jean-Baptiste, Pierre Demers, first Captain of the Militia, and Commandant of Laprairie, Joseph Lerige, esquire, Sieur de Laplante, uncle of Catherine, as well as her cousin Pierre Hubert dit Lacroix, guardian of the storehouse at Saint Jean. The future spouses will enjoy goods in common, and the dowry offered by Jean-Baptiste is fixed at 400 livres. The marriage will be celebrated at Laprairie ten days

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later, on 14 April, by the pastor, Jacques Desligneris, in the presence of several family members and friends of both families.

Further, in 1755, on 26 May, before Notary Gervais Hodiesne, Joseph Payant dit Xaintonge "ships captain at Fort Saint Jean", receives from Charles Lemoine, Baron de Longueuil, Captain of an Infantry Company, domiciled at Rue Notre Dame in Montreal, a land grant of six arpents frontage by thirty in depth, touching on one end the Chambly River, and on the other lands not yet granted. The property is located in the vicinity of Fort Saint Jean. It is assessed at an annual rate of six sols, and a half-minot of milled wheat flour for each area of twenty arpents, payable on Martinmas (11 November). The purchaser agrees to establish home and hearth on this property, the first to be granted in the environs of the Fort.

The Military Journal of Nicolas des Meloizes

On 17 May 1756, King George II of England declared war ^{on} of France, whom he accused of having acted in an unjustifiable manner in the East Indies and particularly in North America since the Treaty of Aachen. In New France and in New England, the pot had long since reached the boiling point. Some day soon, it was bound to spill over, and Lake Champlain was seen as the most likely invasion point for the Americans. The French had built several forts on the Lake to block their progress.

Upon his arrival in Canada some sixty years earlier, Jacques Payan had soldiered with the troops of La Marine, then commanded by François-Marie Renaud d'Avène des Meloises. A grandson of this captain, Nicolas des Meloizes, also made a career for himself in the military, performing distinguished service in Acadia and in Ohio. He took part in the battles of Carillon and of Sainte Foy. The last war waged in New France gave him the opportunity to compose a military journal in which he sometimes takes note of the presence and activities of Joseph Payant on Lake Champlain.

Between 1756 and 1760, Payant played an important part not only as a carrier of troops and military provisions on the Richelieu and Lake Champlain, but also as courier and observer. On Friday 27 August 1756, Nicolas des Meloizes notes in his journal:

We learned that the vessel that left Saint Jean yesterday morning had reached Fort Saint Frederic that evening. Monsieur de Lusignan, commandant of the said fort sent to his son the report of the captain of the vessel as follows:

Saint Onge reports news of the capture of Chouaguen, where we lost only eight men, but took 1800 prisoners, of whom 700 have already left for Quebec, 600 in Dussault's vessel; we took one hundred firearms, three barks, three casks of gold and silver. Monseigneur de Montcalm will cross to Saint Jean today. There are one hundred vessels ready. One hundred twenty natives came to and remained at Saint Jean. There are troops on every road, in order to prevent the enemy from learning of the capture of Chouaguen.

The English lost between four and five hundred men. Hiché came with the natives, and Perthuis interpreted. The Te Deum was sung at Montreal. Xaintonge reports that he had seen the letter that the General wrote about these events to Mr de Saquespee. Six hundred boats were also taken at Chouaguen, and one boat was sunk at the mouth of the Chouaguen River.

On Monday, 30 August, Meloizes adds:

Saint Onge reports that a man named Flame (Nicolas Flame), Sergeant of our troops who was present at the festivities in Montreal returned post haste to Saint Jean with letters from Monsignor de Vaudreuil which he transmitted to Monsieur de Acquire, who ordered at his fort the celebration called for by this good news. He also reported that Madame de Acquire, upon her return to Saint Jean from Lachine, where she has properties, had spoken with Monsieur de Villiers, who had come from Chouaguen and had told her about what had occurred there. The barque will be leaving tomorrow for Saint Jean.

Melosies take up the composition of his journal in 1759. On Friday, 13 October, after the fall of Quebec, hostilities broke out again at Lake Champlain. He writes:

During the night from the 12th to the 13th two seamen reported to Monsieur de Bourlamaque that the vessel commanded by Saint Onge had been pursued by an English ship and an armed skiff, and would certainly have been taken if the ship had not been grounded. Saint Onge sailed into the Mississquoi River, where he remains. It was he who fired the cannon shots we heard yesterday, to warn us as well as the xebecs, which were also attacked, he believes, if they had not been taken.

In his monograph about the Admiral of Lake Champlain, Philippe Demers gives his version of these events, which he entitles "The alarm of 12 October 1759". Payant, he writes, played a significant part in the events of the day. The brilliant victory of the French at Carillon had not discouraged the English, as the capture of Louisbourg represented more than adequate compensation. Intending to bring an end to hostilities in their own favor, the English decided to attack the colony from two fronts: the Saint Lawrence and Lake Champlain.

Amherst amassed an army of 11, 000 troops, including an artillery company, which Abercrombie had lacked. He took Carillon and Saint Frederic within a week. Hebecourt, left at Carillon with 400 men, seeing that the battle was lost, loaded the stores on ships and retreated after blowing up both forts in the face of the invaders. Amherst thus saw the fruits of his victory denied to him. He was master of the gateway to the lake, but he could not enter the lake by boat, as the schooner and the three xebecs opposed him at the river's mouth. He did have possession of the sawmill at the falls, but warships cannot be built in a matter of days. It would only be on 10 October that his vessels were ready, and he started

his army on the move accompanied by two powerful brigantines.

Meanwhile, Bourlamaque was fortifying Isle aux Noix. Receiving word of the movement of the enemy, he sent the schooner and the xebecs on reconnaissance, warning them not to allow themselves to be separated. The goal was to enter the river before the enemy. The schooner, as the most reliable vessel, held the rearguard, and anchored on the evening of the 11 October at the mouth of the channel which divides the Isle of Contrecoeur, in order to observe the bay of Saint-Albans.

The three xebecs sailed toward the Isles of the Four Winds, known now as the Four Brothers. During the night, the English brigantines and the vanguard of the army that followed them, moved ahead of the three French vessels without being observed.

Fortunately, at daybreak, Saint Onge observed at the Isles of White Woods, now known as Sisters Islands, a brigantine carrying twenty 18° cannon, and a two-masted skiff as powerful as his own schooner, which were readying for an attack. He immediately entered the channel. The brigantine gave chase and might have taken him, but it was grounded, and the schooner continued into Missisquoi bay, all sheets to the wind.

The xebecs, under the command of Laubaras, vigorously attacked the English rear guard, which had reached the Isles of the Four Winds, taking one boat, and about twenty prisoners. The wind then turned to the northeast, and the brigantine managed to free itself and headed toward the French vessels, which took refuge in the Tsonnanthouans inlet. During the night, finding himself blocked in, Laubaras scuttled two of his vessels and grounded the third, sending two sloops to Bourlamarque to warn him, and to report on the taking of prisoners. On the morning of the 13th, he set out on the march toward Montreal, with about sixty men. This turn of events was disappointing to Bourlamaque. In a letter to Levis, he complained bitterly about the incompetence of Laubaras, concluding 'I do not believe I will give him command of the galleon of Saint Cloud.'

Everyone at Isle aux Noix believed that the schooner commanded by Saint Onge had either been burned or taken, but after sitting patiently north of Isle Lamotte for three days, waiting for favorable winds, it was the only vessel that returned to port. The old pilot's experience was worth more than the learning of the naval officers.

On Wednesday, 17 October, Meloizes adds to his military journal:

Good weather. Monsieur de Lepervanche left at daybreak with eight soldiers and eight militiamen, and four days' provisions to bring provisions to the schooner, and orders for Saint Onge to return.

Thursday, 18 October:

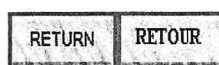
Calm, but overcast. The schooner commanded by Saint Onge arrived about ten in the morning, tugged by two barges, at the orders of Monsieur de Lepervanche. It had left at nightfall from above Isle Lamotte, and remained unobserved in the darkness.

The Sorrowful End of a Career

According to Demers, the naval career of Payant came to an end at Isle aux Noix on 25 August 1760. The English army, eight or nine thousand strong, landed on 14 August on the right bank of the Richelieu, a mile and a half above the fort. It was escorted by six ships armed with cannon, two floating batteries, and six sloops also armed with cannon. Bougainville had established blockhouses on both sides of the mouth of the Riviere du Sud, but was forced to abandon them. He gave orders to Saint Onge to anchor at the mouth of the river.

On 25 August, the English, who had secretly brought a battery of eight cannon facing the tartan, revealed themselves. The captain of the French vessel was killed after giving the order to cut the cable. The seamen, in a panic, swam back to the island, and the west wind carried the tartan toward the enemy, who took possession of it. Bougainville immediately warned Saint Onge to take to open waters. At this place, turns almost at a right angle from east to west, and there was an opposing wind, which explains why, in spite of the pilot's experience, the schooner was grounded on a sandbank located directly north of the mouth of the Riviere du Sud. It was an easy task for Major (Robert) Rogers and his company to cross the little river and take captive our pilot and his vessel. This event had serious consequences, since it allowed Haviland to bring his troops to the western side of the island, at the Bilodeau farm, north of the fort. This forced Bougainville's army to retreat.

Payant, now sixty years old, understood that his career was at an end. The flag which he had served had now been taken back across the sea. The beautiful lake which he had defended was, in 1763, abandoned to New York. Payant, satisfied with his title of veteran mariner retired to Laprairie, where he lived many years longer.



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